

The THOREAU SOCIETY

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THOREAU IN GERMANY by Eugene F. Timpe

After Thoreau got back the unsold copies of his A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers he wrote "I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself" (Journal, 28 October 1853). Both Thoreau's own admission and a body of evidence of all sorts show that during his own lifetime Thoreau had little success in disseminating his books and his ideas. But an equally impressive mass of evidence indicates that during the twentieth century his words and ideas have enjoyed considerable popularity, not only in America but also in foreign lands. It is commonly known that Gandhi was indebted to "Civil Disobedience" for the techniques of passive resistance which he used to such good effect in South Africa and India, it is generally known that while under German occupation during the second World War the Danes successfully employed a form of passive resistance which had been inspired by Thoreau, and it has been shown that a group of Dutchmen at one time actually established a colony modeled upon Walden (Seymour Flaxman, "Thoreau and van Eeden," Der Friede, Heidelberg, 1961, pp. 341-352). Up to the present, however, no attempt has been made to trace Thoreau's reception in Germany.

From even a cursory inspection of the main features of Thoreau's reception in Germany it becomes evident that unlike Longfellow's or Cooper's or Harte's it followed no predictable pattern. It actually took place during two separate periods. The first began about 1890—for thirty years after his death he was almost totally ignored, even by such scavengers of minutiae as nineteenth-century literary historians—and ended around 1910. This was his primary period in Germany. Nearly a dozen articles of a scholarly nature, two of which were of some importance, apparently created sufficient interest so that three publishers offered translations of Walden and one, the selection from his Journal called "Winter." The first translation of Walden made its appearance in 1897. In the following seven years it went through three editions, and the imitation of it by the well-known Diederichs firm leaves little doubt that publication of Thoreau was an attractive business venture. Yet a lapse of seventeen years between the first and second editions of the Diederichs book shows that the success and profit in this venture were limited to the relatively short first period of interest in Thoreau.

Between the two wars Thoreau was almost completely neglected in Germany, but during the Americanization era following the second World War, his Writings, like those of many another American

The Thoreau Society, Inc., is an informal gathering of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau. Mrs. Herbert Hosmer, Concord, Mass., president; Robert Needham, Concord, Mass., vice-president; Walter Harding, State University College, Genesee, New York, secretary-treasurer. Annual membership, \$2.00; life membership, \$25.00.

author, enjoyed great popularity. His revival—there were four new translations during the first five years after the war and these were quickly followed by a number of dissertations—was initiated in all probability by publishers evincing a sensitivity to the demand for things American.

A closer look at his reception reveals some of the details. Apparently Thoreau was not noticed at all in Germany until 1867, the year in which the competent but anonymous author of the general article on American literature in the Brockhaus encyclopedia (Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie für die gebildeten Stände. Conversations-Lexikon, 11th edition, Leipzig, 1864-1868) described Thoreau as one "who with tender thoughtfulness brings to nature a noble human awareness and a microscopic sharpness of observation" (X, 840). None of the several nineteenth century histories of American literature even mentioned Thoreau until Rudolph Doehm, in his Aus dem amerikanischen Dichterwald (Leipzig, 1881), wrote a paragraph on Thoreau which contained as its principle remark the statement that Thoreau had deferred to his brother when it turned out that they both loved the same young lady. Even Eduard Engel's Die amerikanische Literatur (Leipzig, 1884), although it dealt generously with such literary celebrities as Dorgon, Osgood, Wetherall, Tourgee, Cable, Habberton, and Halledk, did not even mention Thoreau's name.

The breakthrough did not come until 1891. The credit for it belongs to a positivist and Kulturkämpfer named Karl Knortz (1841-1918). His Geschichte der nordamerikanischen Literatur (Berlin) contained ten pages of commentary on Thoreau, with the emphasis placed principally upon Thoreau in his role as abolitionist. Knortz's work set the pace for Thoreau studies for the next two decades. Its form was that of the typical German literary study, with just those alterations which were necessary to suit it to its subject. It consisted of a long biography followed by a summary of Thoreau's ideas on nature, abolition, and government. The whole was supported by lengthy quotations. There was scarcely any critical analysis. When it is remembered, however, that the articles on Thoreau by the early reviewers and critics were dedicated to introducing him to a reading public which was previously unaware of his existence, the stereotyped form of presentation seems relatively justifiable. It is unfortunate, however, that such presentations led to an emphasis upon only those parts of Thoreau's life and philosophy which would most certainly appeal to German readers. His views on slavery were constantly summarized, and it could

very well be argued that had he not been involved in the John Brown episode, the underground railroad, and a famous refusal to pay taxes, his German reviewers, including even Knortz, would have found little indeed to say about him.

Knortz's second excursion into Thoreau studies, Ein amerikanisches Diogenes (Hamburg, 1899) deviated but little from the established pattern. His thesis, that Thoreau was an "Anarchist des Idealismus" who attempted to combine the simplicity of nature with the complexities of human civilization, was nearly lost in the mass of biography. Regrettably, the same criticism is just as valid for the work of Carl Federn (1868-1943), journalist, anglophile, and internationalist who has sometimes been mistakenly credited with launching Thoreau's career in Germany. Both his "Henry David Thoreau" (Monatsblätter des Wissenschaftlichen Club in Wien, 9 January 1899) and his chapter on Thoreau in the Essays zur amerikanischen Litteratur (Halle, 1899) were, except for the comment that Thoreau was "Ein moderner Derwisch, bedürfnisslos im städtischen Sinne," little more than appreciative biography.

To the basic chords established by Knortz, variations were sometimes added. Certainly there has always been that quality in the melody of Thoreau's ideas which invites one to rearrange the notes so that they play one's own favorite tune. One of those whose was the least guilty of succumbing to such temptation was a critic named Franz Strunz. But even he had his thesis. His essay, "Das Fortschrittliche und Neue im Naturgefühl bei Henry David Thoreau" (Dokumente des Fortschritts, March 1910, pp. 203-208) introduced the concept of Thoreau as a Kantian. What we call nature, wrote Strunz, is only a manifestation of the union of essence and appearance, or symbol. The laws or hypotheses we project into her form the proof of our souls. It is only subjectivity or spirit that creates. For Thoreau the entire world was the embodiment of Idea; his philosophy of nature and of man was Kantian.

Some of the other variations on the themes of Thoreau were not only a good deal less profound than Strunz's but also positively base. One d. J. A. Prinzinger, in "Henry D. Thoreau, ein amerikanischer Naturschilderer" (Salzburg, 1895), wrote a long essay consisting almost entirely of quotations loosely strung together by cursory remarks. In this essay he introduced the leitmotiv that Americans are such a practical folk and so oblivious to the charms of nature that it is both an unexpected and pleasant surprise to encounter an American who is a nature lover. A sister motiv, that Americans are for the most part so bent on conforming to each other in their common quest for riches that they seldom evince individuality as Thoreau had, was introduced by A. von Ende, at the time from Chicago, in his article for the Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung (26 August 1896). Neither of these themes was repeated during the first period of Thoreau's reception, but both were used in one infamous diatribe which was printed at about the beginning of the second World War, when criticism of America evoked more agreement than praise.

Only two articles were written on Thoreau between the wars, and one of them was an extrusion of venom of the sort that is so common during wartime. Like that collection of anti-American polemics, Die vereinigten Staaten von Amerika (Berlin, 1943), this article by Edgar Maass (Das innere Reich, VI, 1939, pp. 310-335) presented as

the villains American materialism, antipathy to natural beauty, and the "Nihilismus der amerikanischen Seele." America itself was the new democracy "die sich in diesen Tagen aufmachte, einen ganzen Erdteil zu erobern, und die inzwischen—leider Gottes—so rasch gesättigt, alt und philiströs geworden ist." But Thoreau was the hero, and he was praised, the better to criticize his antipodals, i.e., all other Americans. The themes which Maass used were not new. They had been used before by critics of America. Literary scholarship, however, had not been the excuse used in order to present them.

The other interim article was Paul Westphal's "Thoreau als Befrier" (Die Tat, XII, 1920, pp. 501-506). Westphal wanted to revive post World War I Germany. The actualities of inflation and impoverished urbanization, the threat of communism, the desertion of the upper classes, and the fear of capitalistic exploitation led him to suggest a bootstrap operation based upon a back-to-the-pond movement. It was to be supported by cooperative labor, interclass assistance, improved methods of farming, advanced technology, and moral regeneration based upon altruism and curtailment of the human instinct to profit from another's misfortune. The blueprint for this was to have been Walden. It was to have become to Westphal and the Germans what "Civil Disobedience" became to Gandhi and the Indians.

Between 1945 and 1951 Thoreau's writings were again published and scholarly studies were resumed in 1948. Most critics apparently assumed that the need to introduce him was no longer so pressing, so studies took a somewhat different form. His abolitionism was never quite forgotten, of course, but comparative and even religious approaches became more common. The first essay on Thoreau after the war, "Der gerade Weg des H. D. Thoreau" by Fritz Krökel (Der Speicher, 1948, pp. 93-117), strongly emphasized both Thoreau's protest against the tyranny of the majority and his search for religious freedom. According to Krökel, this freedom amounted principally to unobstructed eclecticism in excerpting suitable doctrines from the Chinese, Indian, and Persian religions. That the elements of Thoreau's philosophy which exemplified his revolt against the coercion of the individual should have been emphasized by a post-war German author is a reminder that political and social circumstances can seldom be divorced completely from literary studies as well as that Thoreau's philosophy, as always, lent itself to widely varied interpretations.

As the war years became more remote, studies of Thoreau decreased in number. Of the five articles which were printed during the entire post-war period, two, those by Johannes Urzidil ("Adalbert Stifter und Henry Thoreau," Welt und Wort, 1950, p. 225 and "Weltreise in Concord," Neue literarische Welt, 10 May 1953, p. 8) were comparative studies which sought to disclose resemblances between Stifter and Thoreau. The two were nearly contemporaries, their ideas were often similar, they sometimes used the same images, and Thoreau was probably acquainted with Stifter's writings, particularly the Hochwald. Urzidil's essays were followed by a long and appreciative article by Stefan Andres ("Der Eremit von Walden Pond," Perspektiven, 1955, pp. 52-71) in which Thoreau's religion was examined. His theism was likened to that of St. Francis of Assisi, he was

described as a nominalist, and his mysticism was convincingly equated to that of Meister Eckhart and the Zen Buddhists. Yet in conventional Christianity he found the activity and courageousness to support rebellion and reform.

The last article on Thoreau, Ernst Schlick's "Henry David Thoreau: Ein Held der vereinigten Staaten" (Zeitschrift für Geopolitik, 1959, pp. 7-9) was noteworthy only because its discussion of the political pragmatism of "Civil Disobedience" was one of the few indications that German readers had been acquainted with any of Thoreau's works other than Walden and a few selections from his Journal, and because with the discernment of the sturdy individualism of "Civil Disobedience" the cycle of Germanic studies on Thoreau returned to one of its initial points of departure. But it would be rash to conclude that studies of Thoreau will not be resumed. His reception in Germany may very well not yet be a closed book. As Horst Oppel wisely observed about Thoreau in Kohlschmidt and Mohr's Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte (Berlin, 1955), "his final effect has not yet been felt on either side of the Atlantic" (I, 58). El Camino College, Calif.

GLADYS HOSMER by Mary Sherwood

The 1965-1966 Thoreau Society year is presided over by our first lady President, Mrs. Herbert Buttrick Hosmer of Concord, Mass. She is the daughter of Joshua Bennett Holden, and Ida (Moulton) Holden of Boston; she was born in Lynn, Mass. on Sept. 18, 1886.

On April 20, 1911, she married Herbert Buttrick Hosmer, a 9th generation Concordian. As Gladys Holden she received an A.B. degree from Radcliffe College in 1909; in 1924, having used her own children as study material, she obtained an Ed.M. from Harvard Graduate School of Education. She has also studied at the universities of Oxford, Berlin, and Munich, the Harvard School of Public Health and the Harvard-Radcliffe Institute of Historical and Archival Management.

Mrs. Hosmer served as an Alumnae Trustee of Radcliffe for 6 years, as chairman of the Alumnae Fund for 2 years, and is currently in her 2nd term as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Women's Archives of Radcliffe College.

She is a member of the Town of Concord's Committee on Records and Archives, Archivist of the Women's National Farm and Garden Association and for 10 years has edited their quarterly magazine. She was cited for distinguished service by this Association in 1959. She attended the triennial meeting of the Associated Country Women of the World in Ireland in September as a delegate of the New England Lawn and Garden Association.

Our energetic President is also a member of the State Advisory Committee for the equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and Honorary Trustee of Concord Academy, and former President of the College Club of Boston and of the Concord Woman's Club. In 1958 she received the "Award for Citizenship" from Governor Furcolo of Massachusetts on behalf of Freedom, Inc.

For the Thoreau Society she has served as vice-president, and as the very successful chairman of the Save Walden Committee.

Mr. Herbert Cahoon of New York City, Mrs. Loyd R. Rathbun of Concord, Mass., Prof. Edward G. Fletcher

of Austin, Texas, and Dr. Wilson Powell, Jr., of Washington, D.C., have recently become life members of the Thoreau Society. Life membership is \$25.00.

ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY WH

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- FRAGMENTS. [Thoreau number], III (July, 1965), 1-12 [248-47 Jamaica Ave, Bellerose, N.Y.]. Includes Leonard Kleinfeld, "There is More Divinity in Man Than in God"; Micheline Flak, "Henry David Buddha"; Roland Robbins, "House Hunting for T"; H.S. Good, "Henry D's Influence"; Gladys Hosmer, "Why the Thoreau Society?"; George Bringmann, "T's Civil Disobedience"; Arthur Volkman, "Brandywine"; S.A. Mayers, "Yes, Ishtar, There Are Individuals"; Jack Schwartzman, "Hermit of Disobedience"; Frank Chodorov, "Henry David Thoreau"; R.S. Dickens, "Civil Disobedience: Philosophy and Tactic"; Edwin Flatto, "Need for Sanity"; August Derleth, "Nocturnal Visit"; John Peterson, "The Outsiders."
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- CORRECTION: In the Summer, 1965 bulletin (#92), Roland Robbins' paper on "House Hunting for Henry D. Thoreau" inadvertently got pied. The last paragraph and the last two lines in the next to the last paragraph in the last column belong to the bottom on the next to the last column. Sorry!
- We are grateful to the following for information used in this bulletin: T. Bailey, D. Bernstein, C. Bode, M. Campbell, H. Cahoon, J. Donovan, P. Hebert, G. Hosmer, C. Hoagland, D. Kamen-Kaye, L. Kleinfeld, A. Lowmes, V. Munoz, K. Miller, W. Peterson, R. Robbins, E. Rice, P. Rex, M. Swaller, A. Small, I. Schroeder, R. Story, H. Schon, E. Teale, H. Van Fleet, D. Williams, P. Williams and R. Wheeler. Please keep the secretary informed of new items of Thoreau interest.
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